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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6044
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3690
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2714
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0098
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1488
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3829
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4223

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 001226

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DEPT FOR INL/AEE, S/CT, PRM/ARE AND NEA/ELA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: BORDER CONTROL PLAN STILL LACKING SAY DONORS

REF: BEIRUT 698

Classified By: CDA, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Michael Williams reviewed with international donors on November 4 the very limited progress on border management since their last meeting in June, and attributed it primarily to the lack of a Lebanese government. Noting that border management is a key aspect of UNSCR 1701, he urged the donors to support a Common Donor Position calling on the GOL to express its firm commitment to control the entire border of Lebanon. Williams will ask the new government to appoint a senior level "border czar" to develop a comprehensive border management strategy and budget and oversee its implementation through an integrated border force. He noted that most donors are reluctant to fund the \$50 million next stage of the border project until they see a plan for an integrated interagency border force to control all of Lebanon's land, sea and air entry points. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Williams met on November 4 with international donors to review progress on border management since their June 19 meeting with then-Prime Minister Siniora (reftel). At the June meeting UNSCOL and the donors, noting that border management is a key issue in UNSCR 1701, asked the GOL to express its firm commitment to controlling the entire eastern border of Lebanon and to develop a comprehensive strategy with a detailed budget for the project. Williams noted that UNSCR 1701 calls on the Lebanese government to exercise its sovereignty and control over all of its territory to ensure that there are no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese state. Paragraph 14 of the resolution specifically calls for the GOL to "secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry in Lebanon without its consent of arms or related materiel," with UNIFIL's assistance.

¶3. (C) Williams told ambassadors from the U.S., UK, EU, Canada, Spain, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, France and Japan that although the response from Siniora had been positive, progress on border management since then had been limited by the absence of a government in Lebanon. Based on lessons learned from the northern border pilot project, he noted, most donors were reluctant to fund the next stage of the project to monitor and control the first 70 kilometers of the northeast border. The \$50-million work plan for that phase has been endorsed only by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which dominates the staff and leadership of the Combined Border Force. Williams acknowledged that before most donors would commit funding for the entire project, they wanted to see a plan for an integrated interagency border

force to control Lebanon's borders, including air and sea ports and all legal land border crossings. (Note: Funding for such a project is currently estimated at \$200 million excluding the legal border crossings, sea ports, airports and any socio-economic initiatives. End note.) The plan should address socio-economic as well as security concerns, said Williams. UNSCOL has commissioned a needs assessment study of the border communities, he added, and will share the report once it is completed.

¶4. (C) Williams presented a draft Common Donor Position on Border Management for evaluation (emailed to NEA/ELA). The draft calls for the appointment of a senior-level GOL "border czar" to develop a comprehensive strategy and oversee its implementation through an integrated border force. The appointment of a senior official, Williams noted, would demonstrate the GOL's political commitment to border management and help to eliminate turf battles among the LAF, Customs Service, Internal Security Forces (ISF) and other Lebanese offices, which have hampered the northern border pilot project. The goal, Williams said, is for the donors to present the Common Donor Position to the new government with the hope that the comprehensive strategy can be quickly developed and implemented.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador welcomed the draft Common Donor Position and noted that the U.S. priority is the prompt, full implementation of the security aspects of UNSCR 1701. While the economic development goals of a comprehensive plan are important, she added, the Common Donor Position should push for substantive, near-term action on securing Lebanon's borders even while the plan is being developed.

¶6. (C) While it is still too early to consider specific donor commitments, Williams said, he planned to expand the donor group and will soon meet with officials from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. Responding to a UK query about Syrian cooperation on the project, which is critical for its success, Williams replied that Syria tends to view border issues either in a very narrow scope or purely from a bilateral perspective. As a result, he noted, discussions with Syria are difficult. Williams suggested that bilateral pressure continue on Syria to assist in border control.

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